

ADDRESS TO THE STUDENTS
OF
MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE,

LONDON,

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BY

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,—At the close of an Examination such as we have just gone through, I feel that you can scarcely be in a condition to attend to aught in the shape of a formal dissertation, and I should be going beyond my sphere, if I were to single out for remark any of the studies that are carried on here, and which, as you have proved, are in excellent hands. But I may hope that you will listen to me while I offer a few suggestions respecting the position which you are destined to occupy, looking at it from the vantage-ground of a wider experience than your own. On this alone rests my claim to address you. Having dwelt as yet, for the most part, in “a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts”—“beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies”—you cannot see so clearly what awaits you, when you come “to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes,” as those who have long been tossed upon it, and cannot, therefore, know so well what are the requisites for a safe and successful voyage over it.

First of all, let me say, distinctly and emphatically, that you will not do yourselves justice, nor the cause which you are to

serve, if you yield in any wise to the feeling sometimes expressed, which would lower the demand for true scholarship amongst us. There is, I grant, a field of labour now opening to us that may not call for the same high mental culture as those in which we have hitherto been mainly engaged—though even in it, I am persuaded, if there be the right spirit, such culture will be found not a hindrance but a help, “not waste but a good work;” but it is the special duty of another Institution to send forth labourers into that field, as it is of this to prepare you for one where more extensive learning and varied accomplishments are needed. Not to dwell on the obvious gain to yourselves, and the increased power of influencing others for good, which knowledge will be sure to confer, if it is used to mature your judgment and reflection, and make you not merely learned men but men improved by learning—you will frequently be placed in circumstances where you will be glad that you are able to summon this directly to your aid. For example, you will find that questions are now exciting an interest, and freely discussed, among our thoughtful laity, which demand no slight and superficial acquaintance with theology on the part of those who would take up and maintain a clear, independent position with regard to them. The deference once paid to professional assertions is gone, and if you would be listened to now, it must be for the reasons you bring. You will sometimes feel a dark and heavy atmosphere of doubt around you, and at other times the thick and stifling mists of educated superstition, which nothing but the vivid flashes of a piercing intelligence can dissipate. And occasionally you will be brought in contact with a subtle and refined scepticism which, in its attacks on faith, substitutes, for the old method of direct assault, the more dangerous one of sap and mine, and which it needs all the resources of moral and religious truth to encounter. In these, and such-like cases, those to whom you stand in the relation of

teachers will naturally, and justly, expect that you should be prepared to furnish them with information and opinions on which they may rely, and help them to keep the strength of their souls intact.—You know little, either, of what is taking place in other Churches—of the kind of questions which are agitating them, and the changes they are undergoing—if you do not perceive how necessary it is, unless we are content to lose the post of honour which we have hitherto held in the vanguard of a free theology, that those who are to lead our ranks should be men cased in the armour of proof and equipped with the high-tempered weapons which generous scholarship supplies. It is because we have had such leaders that our little band has exerted, and is still exerting, an influence so confessedly beyond what its numbers would have entitled it to expect. Be worthy to tread in the steps of those leaders, and “guard the laurels that descend to you.” It is too likely that cases will arise in which you may be called upon, as they have been, by your allegiance to sacred truth, to withstand the pretensions of High-Church authority, or expose the mistakes of Dissenting infallibility (such as that which lately gave to the mediæval doctrine of justification by faith the prestige of antiquity, from confounding the Confession of Augsburg with the Confessions of Augustine), and where, without the aids and appliances of learning, you may disgrace the cause which you have to defend. If you are not able to compete, in nicety of classical knowledge or extent of mathematical attainments, with those who “walk the studious cloisters pale” on the banks of the Isis and the Cam, you may, I am convinced, make yourselves masters of what is really important in their acquisitions, and at the same time surpass the generality in such subjects as biblical criticism and interpretation, the history of the Church and its doctrines, the philosophy of human nature and its connection with religion. You have one advantage here

which is often denied to other students,—you can pursue your inquiries with perfect freedom, unchecked by any irreligious fear that true science can ever reveal aught the least at variance with God's true word.—Imagine not, then, though you may be unable yet to see clearly its use, that you can dispense with any part of the discipline provided for you here. Do you who are still passing through it, strive to make the very utmost of it. Seek to form your minds at once to those patient and discriminating habits of thought, which will soon be needed in actual service, to separate the wheat from the chaff, the true from the false; and “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine, that your profiting may appear to all.” And do not you, who are now going from under the special control and supervision of others to play your individual part in the world, think for a moment that your studies are at an end, but only feel that from this time forth you are made responsible to yourselves for your improvement, and that by your own efforts the mental habits in which you have been trained must be continued, and your mental wants be supplied. Labour still to extend and brighten your knowledge, to enrich and ennoble your minds, and shew yourselves more and more “workmen that need not to be ashamed.”

Let me say a word, next, on the call which you will find for definite views of Christian doctrine. Many may over-estimate the importance of this, but others, to my apprehension, underestimate it. The way in which some speak of opinions, as though all were of about the same value and entitled to the same reverence, indicates, to my mind, the want of a lively regard for any. It is pretty much as if a physician were to deem it of no consequence whether the ingredients of his medicines were pure or adulterated. You cannot, I am convinced, divorce practical wisdom altogether from speculative truth. An idea, before now, has moulded a life. The views which a man takes of God, in

proportion as they are sincere, must have a formative influence on his character. If in the highest object of his reverence he sees a stern, pitiless, vengeful taskmaster, you can hardly expect that he himself will be found mild, gentle and easy-to-be-entreated. I have had distinct proof, too, in my own experience, how deleterious the effects may be of a faith which has not reason and conscience for its kin, both in bewildering the mind and perverting the heart; and I am likewise persuaded, that to this source may be traced no small amount of the scepticism which lies smouldering in the bosom of society. In a matter, therefore, of such importance as I cannot but regard this, it seems to me most desirable that, before you come out into the world, you should try to attain to something like clear and satisfactory conclusions concerning the great doctrines of Christian faith, so that you may not be perpetually see-sawing between two sets of opinions. I am not recommending you to *make up* your minds, in anything like a narrow and contracted spirit, leaving no openings for new truth to enter. Far from it. Be ready always to welcome this, let it break from whatever quarter it may. Look for daily light, as you look for daily bread. Correct, and brighten, and enlarge your views by constant study. Interrogate nature, providence, revelation—interrogate philosophy, literature, science—interrogate every oracle by which the responses of a present Deity may be obtained; but be not “ever learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth.” Surely, it is possible to have definite opinions, without reducing them to a petrification—steady convictions, without resisting all change. One of your duties is to be “the manifestation of the truth;” but how can you manifest that which you do not possess? If the light trembles and is confused in your own mind, how can you hope to reflect it clearly into the minds of others? You are to “prove all things,” no doubt; but there is a “good” which you are to

“hold fast,” if you would offer it to your fellow-men. You cannot reach, it is true, that unerring certainty which will qualify you to become authorities before which they are to bow; but you may arrive at conclusions that are satisfactory to yourselves, and which, in a spirit of meekness and love, you may recommend to them. The most earnest faith need never lessen, in the slightest degree, either your humility or your charity.—From our having no creed, an impression widely prevails that we have no clear and settled belief. An unfriendly critic attributes to this cause what he supposes to be our declining state and want of influence. “Its simplicity,” he says, “might give Unitarian preaching a great advantage, but its vagueness and unfixedness ever has been, and must always be, its ruin.” *Fas est et ab hoste doceri*. If too much ground may have been afforded for his “ever has been,” I see none for his “must always be.” Why should not you have your definite convictions—your truth—as well as other men; and why should not you be equally faithful in bearing witness to it?

Again; let me say it is of the utmost importance that you should maintain a deep sense of the real greatness of your work. This will be a powerful stimulus to you in preparing for it, and a needful support in carrying it on. It is to be your business to speak to your fellow-men on the highest themes which can claim their attention—to minister to their spiritual wants—to bring order out of disorder, change vice into virtue, sin into holiness—to feed and nurture those diviner elements of the soul which enable it to conquer the worst evils of life, and triumph over death, and raise it to a companionship with the angels of God. If you do not feel how much nobler a thing it is to be labouring truly in a work like this—the work of the Saviour—than to be most successfully engaged in heaping up riches, or securing any of the ordinary objects of ambition—I must honestly

tell you, you have mistaken your vocation ; you have no call to your calling ; you will fail, and deserve to fail. This, I know, is the feeling sought to be cherished in you here. The true standard is kept before you. But when you come forth to your actual work, you will find things tried by a very different one. You will have to mix with men to whom wealth is one of the highest powers, and who treat the interests with which you have to do as trifling and unreal, compared with those in which they are engaged. And there is a danger to you in this, against which you must be upon your guard. The breath they breathe may dim your true ideal. You may let yourselves, almost unconsciously, be warped by the influences around you, and the false glitter of the earthly mammon dull your sense of the incomparable brightness of the treasure in heaven, and the small hopes and fears which gather round the perishing obscure to you the grandeur of those which belong to the eternal. In this case, your work will not be true work. There will be an element of weakness in it ; and it may become only poor, heartless, irksome task-work. You will not respect it yourselves, and how can you hope that it will be respected by others ? But if you keep before you what the real nature of your ministry is—that it is yours to confer something better than food, or money, or health, or knowledge—yours to make everlasting impressions for good ; and, at the same time, cherish the faith that God is with you as He was with the prophets and apostles of earlier times, and with the saints and martyrs of later days, as interested in your work as He was in theirs, and as ready to strengthen and uphold you in it,—then you will run no risk of proving faithless to it. Your soul will keep its state in a calm, clear region, whence it can look forth and see things in something like their true proportions, and the mere pomp and pageantry of this transient life will fade away into their actual insignificance.—This is a point

to which I attach no slight importance. Make it your fixed and settled faith—let there be no flaw of doubt in it—that grander and nobler work than that which you have chosen, earth has, and can have, none. Begin at once to mould your lives by this faith, and let your souls become so pervaded with it that its influence may be felt, animating and quickening you, in all that you do. This will not render you vain and conceited. You need not despise other men's work, because you honour your own. You may magnify your office, without magnifying yourselves. Nay, the very sense of its greatness—while inspiring you with calm courage and generous devotion, and schooling you to patient labour and cheerful self-sacrifice—will tend to keep you humble. You will feel how little able you are to rise to the height of it, and be made anxious to become more and more equal to it.

Such a sense will lead, almost of necessity, to earnestness in your pulpit ministrations; but this is a requisite so important that I cannot pass it by without distinct notice. The call for it may have degenerated into something like cant, but there is a reality at the bottom of it which is worth attending to. Apathy and indifference, you may be perfectly sure, win no triumphs here, any more than anywhere else. In no case is the rule of effective oratory so true as in this,—if you would move others, you must first be moved yourself; speak not because you must say something, but because you have something to say. It is yours to offer the word of life to the souls that are under your care, but if it is a dead word to your own souls, you will never offer it in such a way as to quicken and vivify theirs. Men soon detect, by a sort of instinct, the difference between him who speaks because he has a post to fill, a party to serve, a living to gain, and him who speaks because he has a conviction to utter, a truth to impart. The former may have the art to dress up his discourse with tact and skill, but all his power will only make

it flash with the cold light that "plays round the head, but comes not to the heart;" while the latter, with far less ability perchance, will be sure to find a response there, because what he says springs out of the intensity of feeling in his own. This has been the case with all who have mightily moved others. It was so with the first preachers of Christianity; and, as far as human agency went, this was the great secret of their success. They were thoroughly convinced themselves, and therefore they convinced others. They were altogether in earnest, and therefore they made a deep impression on the world. They spoke with the tone and authority of faith, and therefore men listened with the deference of disciples. They could say without any hesitation, "We believe, and therefore speak."—It was so with the great leaders of the Reformation. They spoke with such marvellous effect, because they had so fervently embraced their object.—It was so with Whitfield and Wesley. They felt that they were called to do a great work in the revival of the religious life, more especially among the poor and world-neglected. They gave themselves to it, heart and soul. And we know the result. The ignorant were roused to consideration, the profligate reclaimed to virtue, the brutal and besotted won over to piety and goodness.—And so will it be with you. Speak with the force of living conviction—because there is a burden on your souls which you must discharge, a message of God which you must deliver—and then you will find what has been done in the past may be done in the present. If you have that kindling earnestness which is born of clear faith in great principles, success must be yours. Spirit will call unto spirit in tones which it cannot resist, and men be forced to bear witness to the moving words that proceed out of your mouth. You may, it is true, be without some helps which other preachers possess. You will have none of the artificial sanctity of a priesthood to impart influence to your teach-

ing. You will not be able to make any pretensions to apostolical succession, in order to lend authority to what you say. You will have no cloak of church infallibility to throw over your deficiencies. You must carry your commission in your fitness for your work. It must be the weight of your own character which gives you weight. But you have one great advantage above many. You will have no burden of subscription to articles on your conscience, to tempt you to insincerity. You will not be forced to adjust your convictions to some old traditional creed, from which the life has long since departed. It will be your privilege, and esteem it not lightly, to speak out of the fulness of your own mind and heart the things pertaining to man's deepest wants. You will not be obliged to pass your truth through the channels which church authorities approve, and cautiously serve it out in the standard measures which they supply; but you will be free to present it drawn straight from those freshly-springing fountains which God has opened, according to every one's need.

In doing this, there is one point which, I am sure, deserves your attention. If you are to act on men's characters—to make them love virtue and loathe vice, be true and noble instead of false and mean, generous Christians instead of selfish worldlings—you must be able to move them deeply, and this can be done only through their emotional nature. Mere reasoning will never do it. The feelings and sympathies must be engaged; the heart go along with the head. It is the fervent call of the prophet spirit, and not the cold voice of instruction, which rouses men from their slumbers, and kindles them to high action, and braces them up for brave endurance. This is a consideration which, it seems to me, we have too much lost sight of. We can lay claim to minds of wide research, and great intelligence and refinement; but where shall we look for the tenderness that melts and sways the heart at will; where for the eloquence that carries the soul

along with it; where for the thunderbolts that transfix the guilty; where for the influence that descends as softly as dew, as silently as light, and as transforming and efficacious? Let us be honest;—have not the sensibilities been too little cultivated amongst us, the heroic elements been too much overlooked? Has not too exclusive attention been paid to the intellect; and have not the capabilities of our principles for impression been undervalued? It is this, I believe, which has done much to alienate from us men of warm, poetic temperaments, and unfitted our views for popular sympathy and acceptance. An improvement in this respect is undoubtedly taking place, and the results are most encouraging.—As you wish, then, to influence men for good, see that the truths which you have to offer them are not suffered to dwindle into logical forms, or intellectual abstractions, or metaphysical speculations; but bring them forth steeped in the vital warmth of your own inmost heart. You may not, perchance, have the vivid nature which forms the orator almost without effort; but you may have, and should have, the fervour of feeling which naturally runs into poetic expression, and pours itself forth in words of strong and stirring meaning, and which will go far to render you eloquent.

One other point briefly, and I have done. I am inclined to think that there has scarcely been sufficient freedom in our public ministrations, and that we might take a lesson from the first promulgators of Christianity. Preaching was not then the formal thing it has since become, but, as you know, a free and diversified agency. Sometimes in the market-place, sometimes in the private dwelling, or any place that offered, the gospel was preached. And the manner was equally varied. The early preachers endeavoured to be all things to all men, so that they might by all means save some. The methods of Christian influence had not then hardened into unbending forms, but there

was an elasticity about them which contrasts strongly with our own rigid modes. And I much doubt whether the gain is with us. I have no wish that the pulpit should be deprived of its fitting solemnity, but we must see that this becomes not devout dulness, and that the end is not sacrificed to the means. The object to be aimed at is to render religion attractive, interesting and impressive; and there is one method of doing this which, I am convinced, we have not yet sufficiently turned to account. We must all have felt the advantage, in keeping up attention and reaching the heart, which is possessed over a written discourse by a forcible, feeling extempore address; and if so, why should not we, as well as other denominations, avail ourselves of this form of preaching? I can only say, if my own course had to come over again, I would cultivate it with the most sedulous care. There need be in it no slovenliness, no want of thought, or accuracy, or arrangement; and, as experience shews, it may be the means of interesting those with whom the ordinary method very often fails. Is it not desirable, then, that you should acquire a readiness in this way of giving utterance to your thoughts? Many are the occasions now which call for it, and in which you will find your power of usefulness lessened by the want of it; and these will increase with the extension of the missionary spirit which has recently manifested itself amongst us, and which, in my opinion, promises most important results.

The remarks which I now bring to a close are somewhat desultory and unconnected, I know. I care not for that, if they only lead you to contemplate at all more steadily the work which is before you, and to see at all more clearly what are the demands which it will make upon you. As you may easily suppose, we who are soon to quit the stage cannot but look with no little interest and anxiety on you, into whose hands we are about to commit the cause which we have laboured for and loved, and on

whose fidelity its future success must needs so greatly depend. We believe that it demands, and deserves, the consecration to it of an undivided heart and undivided life. If you do not feel this, and are not prepared to devote to it every power and every energy which God has given you, you are not worthy of it. If you do feel this, and are ready to spend and be spent in its service—to work honestly and faithfully for its promotion, earnest yet not hasty, resolute yet not rash, calm yet not indolent, hopeful yet not impatient, watching and waiting day by day for the calls which it makes upon you—then your reward is sure; you will find your hands continually growing stronger, and difficulties giving way before you, and have many witnesses to your success here, and a higher witness above.

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